

## **Making the connection- Farmer Panel Discussion**

One way to learn about the different types of farms, management styles, decision-making processes, and viewpoints is to invite farmers to participate in a panel discussion. There are many different topics and ways to facilitate the discussion. Here are some options for classes to consider. There are suggestions for a general topic and sub-topics, questions or discussion points that could be used.

Students should:

1. Identify the type of panel they would like to assemble
2. Write, call or email potential participants with letters of invitation
3. Create background information for the panel that would be used to introduce the panelists, describe what the panel will cover, and give audience/students background for preparing questions.
4. Identify a moderator for the panel
5. Set up the room/venue for the panel- tables, chairs, microphones, space for audience
6. Will audio – visuals be used? If so, coordinate the panelist's needs with school equipment
7. Conduct the panel
8. Write thank you notes to the panelists
9. Write a one-page summary of the panel including- What did they learn? What surprised them? How did the panelists differ from each other? Which panelist did they identify with or would like to be like? What follow-up questions do they have for the panelists?

### **Different types of commodities raised on farms**

Panelist raises different commodities (i.e. dairy, grain, poultry, fruit, vegetables, hogs, beef, goats)

- Each farmer describes their commodity and their farm operation
- Why did you choose that commodity?
- How do you market your products?
- Are you in competition with each other or do you benefit/complement each other?
- What are the challenges of your commodity?
- Do you belong to commodity organizations, promotional groups, or get assistance in some way?
- What are the major factors affecting profitability for your farm?

### **Farm Management and Marketing Options**

Panelist may operate family operations (husband and wife; father/son or daughter, family corporations), CSA (Community Supported Agriculture); non family farms; roadside/direct markets; on-farm store or direct marketing.

- How did your farm get started?
- Describe your farm.
- Why did you choose this type of management or marketing style?
- What challenges do you find with this type of farm?
- What benefits do you find with this type of farm?
- Where do you get help, advice or information?
- If you had to start over, would you make the same decisions?
- What is your succession plan for your farm?

### **Historical View point of Farming**

Panelist would include retired farmers or local historians that would have knowledge about agriculture and farming in that area.

- What types of farms were in our area 100 years ago? 50 years ago? 25 years ago?
- How did the farms differ from today in number of acres? Number of animals? Where the inputs were purchased? Where the products were marketed?
- What was a typical day like when you were a child?
- What change/development/invention made the biggest impact on you? Your farm?
- What did various items cost when you were younger? i.e. tractors, gallon of milk, cars, gallon of gas
- If you could pick something that you wish never changed, what would it be and why?
- What was a historic announcement or event that you remember vividly?
- How big was the town/city when you were younger? How many students in the high school?

### **Embracing Technology**

Panelists would include producers or agribusiness employees who work with equipment, biotechnology, farm inputs (seed, feed or fertilizer), or other technology. You may consider including farmers on both ends of the “adaptation curve- early adaptors to late adaptors”.

- How do you learn about new technology and production methods?
- When you are considering adapting new technology, how do you determine implementation costs? How it will fit into your operation? The risks vs. benefits to the producer or consumer?
- What is your educational background?
- What was the biggest risk or decision you have made?
- Once you have used a new technology or product, how do you evaluate its success? Profitability?
- How do you use the Internet? Do you attend training sessions or workshops? How do you use information from companies, UW- Extension or government agencies?
- Do you have any special license or certifications? Did you need them to use the new technology you began using?

### **Career Panel – Jobs related to agriculture**

Panelists would include people involved in production agriculture, farming, agri-business, processing and distribution.

- What is your job title and what do you do?
- What type of education do you have?
- Do you have a special certification? License? How did you get it and how do you maintain it?
- What is your favorite part of your job?
- What is your least favorite part of your job?
- How did you learn about this type of job? Who influenced you or was a mentor to you?
- What skills do you need to have?
- How has your job changed in the last five years? Ten years? Twenty years?
- What high school subjects would be helpful for this career?
- Do you encourage people to consider your career area? Are there job openings?
- What is a typical day like in your job?